



North Carolina Trails Program **ANNUAL REPORT** 2023



division of parks and recreation

NCTRAILS



NC DEPARTMENT
OF NATURAL AND
CULTURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION
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NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES
Roy Cooper, Governor | D. Reid Wilson, Secretary



Gorges State Park

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1.0 Introduction



Elk Knob State Park

Each year, the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation (the Division) submits a Trails Report to outline trail needs, describe additions to the State Trails System, and summarize the growing importance of trails across the state. This report is prepared by the Division's Trails Program (Trails Program) for the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) in accordance with N.C.G.S. 143B-135.102.

The Trails Program originated in 1973 with the North Carolina Trails System Act and is dedicated to helping citizens, organizations, and agencies plan, develop, and manage all types of trails, ranging from greenways and trails for hiking, biking, and horseback riding to paddle trails and off-road vehicle trails.

The staff of the Trails Program work to enable volunteers, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies to develop trail plans, preserve land corridors for trails, and manage trails for all trail users. Program staff provide technical assistance, administer federal Recreational Trails Program grants, and develop successful partnerships with local conservation and recreation advocates, including town, city, and county governments.

State officials have deemed 2023 as the Year of the Trail in North Carolina. The celebration marks the 50th anniversary of the North Carolina Trails System Act, which outlined methods for establishing a statewide system of trails to address outdoor recreation needs and promote public access to natural and scenic areas. Five decades later, the Year of the Trail has provided an opportunity to highlight and promote North Carolina's now-extensive trail system and to engage the public in trail use and advocacy.

2.0 Incredible Value of Trails



William B. Umstead State Park



Carvers Creek State Park



Dismal Swamp State Park

Trails Boost Local Economies

Trails directly contribute millions of dollars in economic benefits to local communities. As a major tourism draw, they provide a steady stream of customers for businesses — trail users, after all, need places to sleep, eat, and shop. These benefits are especially poignant for smaller rural towns. In western North Carolina, the town of Elkin reinvented itself as a trail town, replacing a floundering local textile industry. New trail-related businesses have rejuvenated the economy in and around the town. Elkin also hosts annual Trail Days, which in turn provides a boost to tourism and the local economy.

Bustling urban areas also enjoy economic boosts through trails. In 2022, North Carolina State University's Institute for Transportation Research and Education conducted a study on the impact of the Carolina Thread Trail on the Charlotte area and surrounding suburbs. Researchers looked at six newly completed trail segments, representing just 1% of the total Carolina Thread Trail network. The six segments alone are estimated to have an economic output of \$25.8 million, averaging \$2.1 million per trail mile.

Across the state, trails, greenways, and blueways are a significant part of North Carolina tourism and industry. As noted in the 2021 General Assembly's House Bill 554 designating 2023 as the Year of the Trail, outdoor recreation is a \$28 billion industry in the state. The state, as a whole, benefits from tax revenues generated by trails, ensuring that money spent on trails provides excellent return on investment.

Trails also provide economic benefits to individuals. They create and support jobs — from trail construction and maintenance to the establishment of new businesses and successes of existing ones. The 2022 Carolina Thread Trail study showed that 15 jobs are supported by each trail mile; with over 300 miles of trails in the network, that adds up to 4,500 jobs in the Charlotte area alone. Nationwide, a 2012 study commissioned by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials found that walking and biking trails created 17 jobs per \$1 million spent, more than any other type of infrastructure project.

Trails have also been a boon to homeowners. Most studies on the impact of trails on property values find a 3-5% increase for single-family homes located near a trail. In a report commissioned by the East Coast Greenway Alliance in 2017, the greenway — now a North Carolina state trail as well — is estimated to provide a total of \$164 million rise in property values in the Triangle. In 2008, the National Association of Home Builders found that trails are the most desired community amenity that homeowners seek when buying a home; more recent studies have shown proximity to trails remains a high demand among most age groups of homebuyers.

Trails Connect Communities

In 1990, the population of North Carolina was 6.6 million; the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that as of July 2022, that number has reached nearly 10.7 million. These new residents need places to live, work, and study, and the state has continually lost open space to development and urbanization. As cities grow and expand into rural areas, people get further and further away from access to natural surroundings.

The increase in trail use during the COVID-19 pandemic proved that given time and opportunity, many people will find solace in nature's beauty. Trails not only provide green spaces to enjoy nature within cities, but they also allow for seamless connections to larger parks and more remote wilderness. Most planning corridors for state trails, for instance, connect larger towns and cities to state parks. By providing a low-cost means to travel to other communities and explore other areas of the state, trails help make outdoor recreation accessible to people from all walks of life.

Trails also foster social capital, as evident during North Carolina's Year of the Trail. Many rural communities have participated in the celebrations and encouraged their residents to explore their local trails. Special events have brought neighbors together outdoors. Even beyond Year of the Trail, trail building, use, and maintenance promote civic participation and engagement through volunteering and advocacy.



Eno River State Park



Hammocks Beach State Park



Grandfather Mountain State Park

Trails Protect the Environment

Population growth and urbanization have also changed the state's landscape dramatically. Trails help reclaim natural land and mitigate human impacts on the environment. By providing opportunities to enjoy and experience the outdoors and nature, trails can inspire users to take responsibility and stewardship of the world around them. Many trail organizations are also eco-minded and seek to teach low-impact recreation and Leave No Trace principles.

Trails provide a choice for North Carolinians to reduce their carbon footprint by utilizing alternate methods of transportation. Creating a network of interconnected trails makes it easy for someone to walk, hike, or bike to their destination and curtail vehicle emissions. Trails improve water quality, too. Surface runoff from roads and lawns is one of the leading causes of pollution in the drinking water supply. Protected natural corridors for regional trails and greenways can filter pollutants from runoff. Land conservation efforts, especially near rivers and streams, help make drinking water sources cleaner and reduce the cost of water treatment.

Cities have started to utilize trails and greenways as natural floodplains to mitigate flood risk and damage to people and properties. Conservation efforts through trail advocacy also protect sensitive areas like wetlands and nature preserves in urban and rural areas alike. Most importantly, trails help address habitat fragmentation. They can serve as protected "highways" for wildlife, allowing species access to more land and resources. These wildlife corridors also help strengthen biodiversity by reducing ecological isolation.

Trails Promote Healthy Living

Trails have become an important part of health and wellness and have been proven to increase quality of life. Compared to other outlets for physical activity, trails are usually free, offer a variety of activities, and provide picturesque surroundings to enjoy. People from all economic levels can use trails, and many trails — especially greenways — are accessible to individuals with limited mobility or disabilities.

Hiking and walking are consistently ranked as top recreational activities nationally. The huge influx of visitation to parks during the COVID-19 pandemic introduced many first-time users to outdoor activity, and many have continued to return to enjoy trails. Trails can also add a social element to physical activity that further encourages consistent participation; guided hikes, walking meetups, and running groups can utilize trails without being limited by cost or space. Trails also provide stress relief and other mental health benefits as users enjoy nature — with others or even alone.

The health benefits from trails can be quantified by studies that look at the impact of trail use on health care costs. The 2017 East Coast Greenway Alliance study estimated \$1.4 million in healthcare cost savings annually for Triangle residents. The 2022 Carolina Thread Trail study calculated an average impact of \$310,000 in healthcare savings per trail mile, potentially adding up to \$93 million for the whole trail network.

3.0 Year of the Trail



Year of the Trail Canoe Hike at Carvers Creek State Park



Year of the Trail Park in the Dark Hike at Jockey's Ridge State Park



Hikers on a Year of the Trail Trail Days event held at Lake James State Park. Photo: Amanda Finn, Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail



First Day Hike at Jockey's Ridge State Park with Ranger Austin Paul



Paddlers on State Parks Big Canoes for a Year of the Trail event at Salmon Creek State Natural Area

Governor Roy Cooper and the General Assembly designated 2023 in North Carolina as the Year of the Trail. To date, it has been the largest statewide celebration of trails and outdoor recreation in North Carolina history. The goals of this historic occasion are to:

- Inspire people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to try trails
- Demonstrate the importance of trails to North Carolina
- Boost outdoor recreation across the state in all 100 counties
- Promote safe and responsible use of trails with the Outdoor NC Principles
- Advance diversity and inclusion on trails

The Division has been collaborating extensively with various organizations and agencies on the Year of the Trail celebrations. DNCR has sponsored 15 Trail Days weekends across the state; modeled after the annual Trail Days in Elkin, these events have offered guided and self-guided hikes and paddles, live music, food, and more. For their 2023 highway maps, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) featured the Year of the Trail. The Great Trails State Coalition (the Coalition) spearheaded the public relations and outreach campaign across the state throughout the year. The campaign is working directly with organizations to increase access for people who have historically faced and still face barriers to trails in North Carolina. In the first half of 2023, the Coalition reached over 13 million people through digital content, media, and advertising — including a radio spot by Richard Petty. Over 1,400 Year of the Trail events have been held, with at least one event in 85 counties. Monthly themes for trail events were also distributed to state and local agencies to assist in their planning. In addition, the Division chose “Year of the Trail” as the interpretive theme for all state parks for 2023, and park staff have held hundreds of themed programs, including guided paddles and StoryWalks.

The Year of the Trail started with First Day Hikes in all state parks and on many state trails. At Carvers Creek State Park, First Day hikers for the Year of the Trail celebrations could choose from guided canoe, nature, or history excursions. Jockey's Ridge State Park represented the Year of the Trail in the local Saint Patrick's Day parade and gave park visitors unique glimpses of the park with guided night hikes. In the mountains, Lake James State Park hosted a Trail Days event that included guided hikes, bilingual hikes led by the organization Latinos Aventureros, and a living history encampment. Subsequent celebratory events have included a scavenger hunt for glass pinecones on trails throughout Moore County; numerous trail workdays by volunteers throughout the state; hiking challenges by many counties and land conservancies; and a documentary on North Carolina trails produced by PBS.

The same organizations that have worked tirelessly to salute the Year of the Trail are now striving to brand North Carolina as “the Great Trails State” to continue the recognition of trails beyond 2023. One of the first events towards this endeavor is observing the third Saturday of October as Great Trails State Day. October 21, 2023, will be the inaugural Great Trails State Day.

4.0 State Trails and Complete the Trail Program

North Carolina's state trails are essential components to its identity as the Great Trails State. Authorized by the General Assembly, each state trail is a unit of the North Carolina state parks system. However, unlike state parks, state trails are not owned, managed, or maintained by the Division, unless the trail segment is located within a state park. Instead, state trails are built and sustained through dedicated partnerships.

Complete the Trail Program

The Complete the Trail Program (CTP), included in the 2021 North Carolina budget, has greatly strengthened these partnerships and transformed state trails by providing funding. The legislation directed that the funding be administered by DNCR for the planning, construction, promotion, and maintenance of state trails. The funds are distributed, where practicable, through identified state trail partners. The partners of the 12 state trails that were authorized prior to the legislation in 2021 were eligible for capacity building and development funds through the CTP, providing them with resources to prioritize developing and completing their state trail. The fund also created a grant manager position within the Division's Planning section to assist with the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between DNCR, the Division and the state trail partners.

The signed MOU formalizes the collaboration and cooperation between the Division and each partner organization. As part of the MOU, each trail partner has developed and submitted a five-year plan for their state trail. The plans include details on how the partners will use allocated funds and capacity building funds as well as priority projects for the trail, with an expectation that the projects will begin within 5 years. Each partner's accomplishments during the 2022-2023 fiscal year are listed in the following section, as well as summaries of their plans to use their capacity building funds and their top priority CTP projects. The full text of each five-year plan is available on the NC Trails website, www.trails.nc.gov.

Each trail partner meets every other month with the Division's state trail planners to share updates and brainstorm solutions to evolving issues.

State Trail	Partner	Year Authorized	Planned Miles	Designated Miles (8/1/23)	Allocated CTP Funds
Dan River State Trail (DNST)	Dan River Basin Association	2021	90	23.61	\$507,375
Deep River State Trail (DRST)	Piedmont Land Conservancy	2007	Land: 125 Paddle: 125	Land: 4.35 Paddle: 5.8	Land: \$860,828 Paddle: \$0
East Coast Greenway State Trail (EGST)	East Coast Greenway Alliance	2021	795	102.14	\$4,971,282
Equine State Trail (EQST)*	TBD	2023	Land: TBD	0	\$0
Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST)	Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail	2015	100	30.9	\$502,150
French Broad State Trail (FBST)	MountainTrue	1978	117	0	\$210,375
Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)	Conserving Carolina	2017	50	17.6	\$358,678
Haw River State Trail (HRST)*	TBD	2023	Land: TBD Paddle: TBD	0	\$0
Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)	Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail	2000	1,400	681.3	\$5,086,059
Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)	Blue Ridge Conservancy	2019	40	0	\$286,943
Overmountain Victory State Trail (OVST)	OVNCST-Friends	2019	225	1	\$1,614,053
Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)	Roanoke River Partners	2021	132	88.4	\$507,375
Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)	Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina	2019	170	0	\$1,219,506
Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)	Yadkin Riverkeeper	1985	162	119	\$210,375

*Indicates state trails that were authorized after the Complete the Trail Program Funds were allocated in 2021

4.0 State Trails and Complete the Trail Program

State Trail Authorizations

The Haw River State Trail was authorized by the General Assembly in June 2023 and will traverse approximately 80 miles along the Haw River from Haw River State Park to Jordan Lake State Recreation Area. Built on the idea of conservation through recreation, this trail is envisioned to include both paddle and hiking trails along the length of the river.

The Equine State Trail was authorized by the General Assembly in July 2023 and will encompass Chatham, Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, and Richmond counties. The trail will consist of an approximately 350-mile loop that connects Jordan Lake State Recreation Area, Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve, and Carvers Creek and Raven Rock state parks. This state trail is envisioned for equestrian use and for equestrian camping opportunities along the way.

Trail Designations

As trail segments are constructed on land-based trails and paddle accesses are developed on blueways (paddle trails), they are not part of the state trail until they are officially designated by the Secretary of DNCR. This process includes an application by the land manager to the state trail planners, evaluation by Division staff, a site visit, and a formal recommendation by the North Carolina Trails Committee.

In the 2022-2023 fiscal year, 20.8 miles of trail were designated as part of a state trail. Segments on the OVST and HGST were designated for the first time. Division staff expect an increase in designation applications in the next few years due to the Complete the Trail Program.

The Division has created a designation application for access sites on the state trails that are blueways. While the river serves as the trail for users, they must access the river through safe, public access sites. These applications are reviewed by the North Carolina Trails Committee and final approval is granted by the Secretary of DNCR, similar to land-based trail designation applications.

In the 2022-2023 fiscal year, 35 paddle accesses were designated. Once paddle accesses are designated, the mileage between the designated accesses are recognized as the designated mileage on the paddle trail, presuming that it is a reasonable paddle between adjacent, designated sites. The 35 paddle access designations this fiscal year led to 231.2 miles of river designated.

State Trail	Planned Mileage	Designated Mileage	Percent Complete
Dan River State Trail (DNST)	90	23.61	26%
Deep River State Trail (DRST)	125	Land: 4.35, Paddle: 5.8	5%
East Coast Greenway State Trail (EGST)	795	102.14	13%
Equine State Trail (EQST)	TBD	0	0%
Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST)	100	30.9	31%
French Broad State Trail (FBST)	117	0	0%
Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)	50	17.6	35%
Haw River State Trail (HRST)	TBD	0	0%
Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)	1,400	681.3	49%
Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)	40	0	0%
Overmountain Victory State Trail (OVST)	225	1	0%
Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)	132	88.4	67%
Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)	170	0	0%
Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)	162	119	73%

State Trail	Paddle Accesses Designated
Dan River State Trail (DNST)	7
Deep River State Trail (DRST)	1
Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)	15
Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)	12

4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program

Capacity Building Funds

Most of the trail partners have chosen to invest their capacity building funds into additional staffing to significantly increase the planning and development of the state trails. However, the capacity funds extend only through 2023. Recurring capacity funding would enable partners to continue their focus on their state trail.

To receive the initial capacity building funds of \$49,500, each partner needed an accepted five-year plan, signed MOU, submitted qualification documentation to contract with the state, and an executed contract. Capacity building funds were distributed in September 2022.

Trail Development Funds

The development funds of the Complete the Trail Program were allocated in September 2022 to the partners of the 12 state trails that were authorized at the time of the legislation in 2021. Many of the partners have used portions of these funds to make progress on the development of the state trails. Several projects are also in the beginning stages for completion in the coming years.

State Trail	Number of Projects	Development Funds Project Contracts
Deep River State Trail (DRST)	1	\$168,100
French Broad State Trail (FBST)	4	\$70,420
Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)	1	\$4,500
Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)	6	\$401,778
Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)	1	\$364,650
Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)	1	\$22,000
Total:	14	\$961,028

Land Acquisition Grants

The first grant application cycle of the CTP Land Acquisition Grant concluded in May 2023, with award letters distributed in August 2023. The Division received 15 applications from eight partners. A second application cycle will occur in fall 2023.

Partnership with NCDOT

State trails were instrumental in the Great Trails State Plan released by NCDOT, and Trails Program staff worked closely with NCDOT during the planning stage. The Division has continued to partner with NCDOT to provide trail user access on bridge replacement projects that are along state trail routes. Division staff are also discussing with NCDOT the possibility of having signage on bridges over rivers that serve as paddle trails. This signage will be essential to increase safety and information along paddle trail routes.

Branding and Promotion

The Division has worked hard to develop consistent branding and promotion for all the state trails. These efforts resulted in an original design for a blaze for each state trail. While blazes are primarily used to mark a trail's path through the woods, these designs are also incorporated into trailhead signage, mapping, and safety signage for paddle trails.

Each of the designs incorporated input and approval from the partner organization. They are included in the following section. The Division has developed a licensing agreement that enables the partners to use the blaze designs on merchandise and other promotional materials. Additionally, the Division's NC Trails website bolstered the content relating to state trails throughout the year.

North Carolina Trails System Map



River clean-up on the Dan River State Trail



Ribbon-cutting event for the first designated segment of the Overmountain Victory State Trail in Spruce Pine

4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



Dan River State Trail (DNST)

The Dan River crosses the North Carolina and Virginia border eight times on its 214-mile journey from the Blue Ridge Mountains to Kerr Lake. Ninety miles of the river that are in North Carolina were authorized as a state trail in 2021. The Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) is the trail partner for the DNST. This trail is a blueway or paddle trail, requiring public accesses every 5-10 miles.

Fiscal Year Accomplishments:

The DRBA hired a North Carolina program coordinator, began the Master Plan for the DNST, and successfully got seven river accesses designated by DNCR. They have also begun discussions with Esri, a geographic information system software company, to obtain a nonprofit package, which will help with the planning process.

DRBA has also been working on developing and furthering its partnerships with other organizations. For instance, they have been working with North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission to designate additional paddle accesses in Stokes County — including the new Pitzer Road access, Harts access, and Jessup’s Mill. They are also working with Stokes County on further collaboration for their river accesses. The DRBA is also cultivating partnerships in Caswell County to include their accesses and development into the Division’s plan. Potential connections with the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail are coming to life with the addition of a property in Stokes County on the Dan River, thanks to the Piedmont Land Conservancy. The association is also exploring future connections to the Mayo River State Park’s General Management Plan and to the river itself through Rockingham County’s Rivers and Trails Master Plan and involvement on the Mayo River Park Advisory Council.

During the Year of the Trail, DRBA has held a First Saturday Outing every month in Caswell, Rockingham, and Stokes counties. These outings are free and open to the public and involve hiking and paddling. From April 21 to 23, the association also participated in the DNCR Trail Days in Eden and Rockingham County, scheduling guided paddling sessions on the river. In May, DRBA hosted a successful Dan River Cleanup with 12 super volunteers who cleaned the river and with multiple event host partners.

Capacity Building Fund Projects:

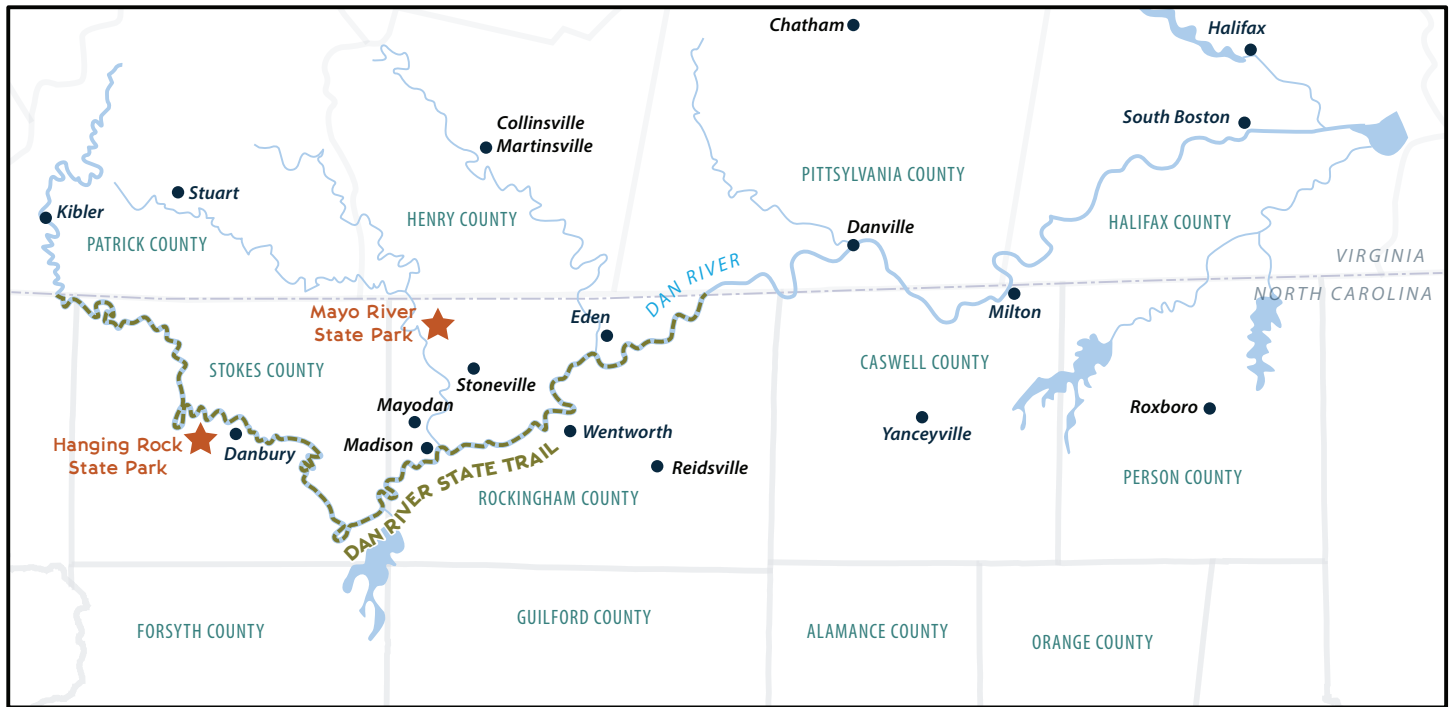
The DRBA plans to use its capacity-building funds from the CTP to add staff support, including a part-time DNST assistant; to purchase Esri materials, fieldwork tools, and supplies; to update their website and develop promotional information, volunteer recognition opportunities and events; and to conduct river safety information sessions.

Priority CTP Projects:

The DRBA’s five-year plan identified its priority projects as the development of a master plan for the DNST; the renovation and designation of current public accesses; the creation of a signage plan for Stokes County; land acquisition and a permanent easement and/or purchase for the Settles Bridge Access; and the completion of priority accesses identified on the master plan.

Estimated cost for all priority projects	\$430,000
Estimated cost for all projects	\$665,000
CTP allocation	\$507,375

4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



LEGEND

- - - Planned Trail
- ★ State Park
- County Line
- City
- State Line
- ~ Water



4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



Deep River State Trail (DRST)

The Deep River State Trail was originally authorized in 2007 as, at the time, the only land and water state trail. The hiking/biking and paddle trails will each be approximately 125 miles long. The trail starts near Jamestown in Guilford County, continues through Randolph and Moore counties, follows the border between Lee and Chatham counties, and ends at the confluence with the Haw River at Mermaid Point—where the rivers form the Cape Fear River. Piedmont Land Conservancy (PLC) is the trail partner for the DRST. Randolph County has previously led efforts and made significant progress with development, branding and promotion through the local Tourism Development Authority; they have worked with the PLC to coordinate the five-year-plan and the trail's master plan.

Fiscal Year Accomplishments:

The Deep River State Trail Steering Committee was formed and composed of representatives from PLC; Randolph, Moore, Chatham, and Lee counties; Piedmont Triad Regional Water Authority; High Point; Triangle J Council of Governments; the Triangle Land Conservancy; and The Conservation Fund. The group met multiple times through the fiscal year, including to review a draft of the DRST Master Plan, finalized in October 2022, and to select five-year plan project priorities for 2023.

In Lee and Chatham counties, river accesses at both U.S. 421 and U.S. 15/501 bridges received funding from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission and the Division. Both sites completed construction and celebrated a ribbon cutting held on June 14. In February and March, PLC visited properties owned by the Triangle Land Conservancy at McIver Landing and White Pines Nature Preserve to review river access needs and opportunities.

The steering committee also met several times to discuss a pilot project from the NCDOT Great Trails State Plan. The project will create a land trail from the Triangle Land Conservancy's White Pines in Sanford to the Justice Tract in Moncure, where the Division is planning on adding a river access and trails as a satellite area of Jordan Lake State Recreation Area. The Conservation Fund is acquiring lands to connect these two properties, and the committee met with both Alta Planning and Design, the contractor for the pilot project, and with representatives from the lower DRST. In the meeting with Alta Planning, the group also discussed a section of the DRST to Randleman Lake and one near Randleman High School.

Chatham County agreed to take the lead on a section of the land trail from Carabonton to Moncure. In April, they applied for funding from the NC Department of Justice's Environmental Enhancement Grant Program to conduct a feasibility study. They also applied for a \$50,000 land acquisition CTP grant to cover the transactional cost for The Conservation Fund to acquire and transfer several tracts between Rocky River and Moncure to the Division. The CTP money was awarded in July 2023.

Another project that received funding is the Sandy Creek Bridge to connect Franklinville's rail trail section with the Ramseyer rail trail section. PLC received a \$100,000 grant from the Division's Recreational Trails Program, and Randolph County provided a \$300,000 match. The county is also funding the 0.75-mile trail on either side of bridge; this project is slated for completion in fall 2024.

In Worthville, there are two projects made progress during the fiscal year. The first is to provide river accesses at Worthville in Randleman and at Central Falls in Asheboro. The NC Wildlife Resources Commission agreed to construct and maintain a ramp instead of river access at Worthville; construction began in October 2022 and was completed in March 2023, followed shortly by a ribbon cutting event at the end of the month. Since the original site for Central Falls is in the floodway where a federal permit will be needed, the PLC has made several attempts to acquire two other sites. The second project is the Deep River Greenway Phase III in Randleman, which will provide a trailhead in Worthville and extend the trail 1.5 miles to the rock outcrop at the end of Phase II. Part of the trail near the Worthville boat ramp has been constructed.

In Randolph County, the preliminary engineering report, environmental assessment and cost estimate for Bush Creek Bridge project were completed February 2023. In June, the Division signed a task agreement for Phase IA – Engineering for the bridge and trail design, which will utilize \$158,000 in CTP funds. The county also signed a contract for bridge engineering.

The DRST's CTP allocation has been earmarked for the Franklinville to Cedar Falls section, which consists of two trailheads, a bridge over Bush Creek and two miles of trail construction. Sapona/Universal Fibers agreed to donate easements on Mill House Lane for the trailhead and 1000 feet of former railroad bed to avoid constructing trail on adjacent easement. The project description/maps were sent for environmental review in December 2022 and comments have been received from the NC Department of Environmental Quality and the State Historic Preservation Office. Also in December, the conceptual plan for Cedar Falls to Central Falls section was completed, which was funded by Randolph County.

The Deep River Park/Camel Back Bridge Access was officially designated as part of the DRST. Others including the High Point Greenway and the Worthville Boat Access are slated for designation application in fall 2023.

For the Year of the Trail, each of the five counties along the DRST have hosted events, with 13 communities in Randolph County signing Year of the Trail proclamations. The DRST hosted a First Day Outdoors hike to kick off the year at the Franklinville rail trail section. Ribbon-cutting events for projects along the DRST and within the five counties also celebrated the Year of the Trail. The spring and early summer were particularly busy for Year of the Trail events on the DRST: on April 22, Downtown Asheboro held a cleanup for Randolph Creek Week; on April 23, Worthville hosted a paddle cleanup; on April 29, the Asheboro

4.0 State Trails and Complete the Trail Program

Center City Garden and Trail held a groundbreaking event; on May 13, Sanford hosted DNCR Trail Days; and on June 3, the North Carolina Zoo held a ribbon cutting for its Spring Trail, offering Year of the Trail backpack and shirt giveaways for National Trail Day (Bachelor’s Creek at the zoo flows into the Deep River).

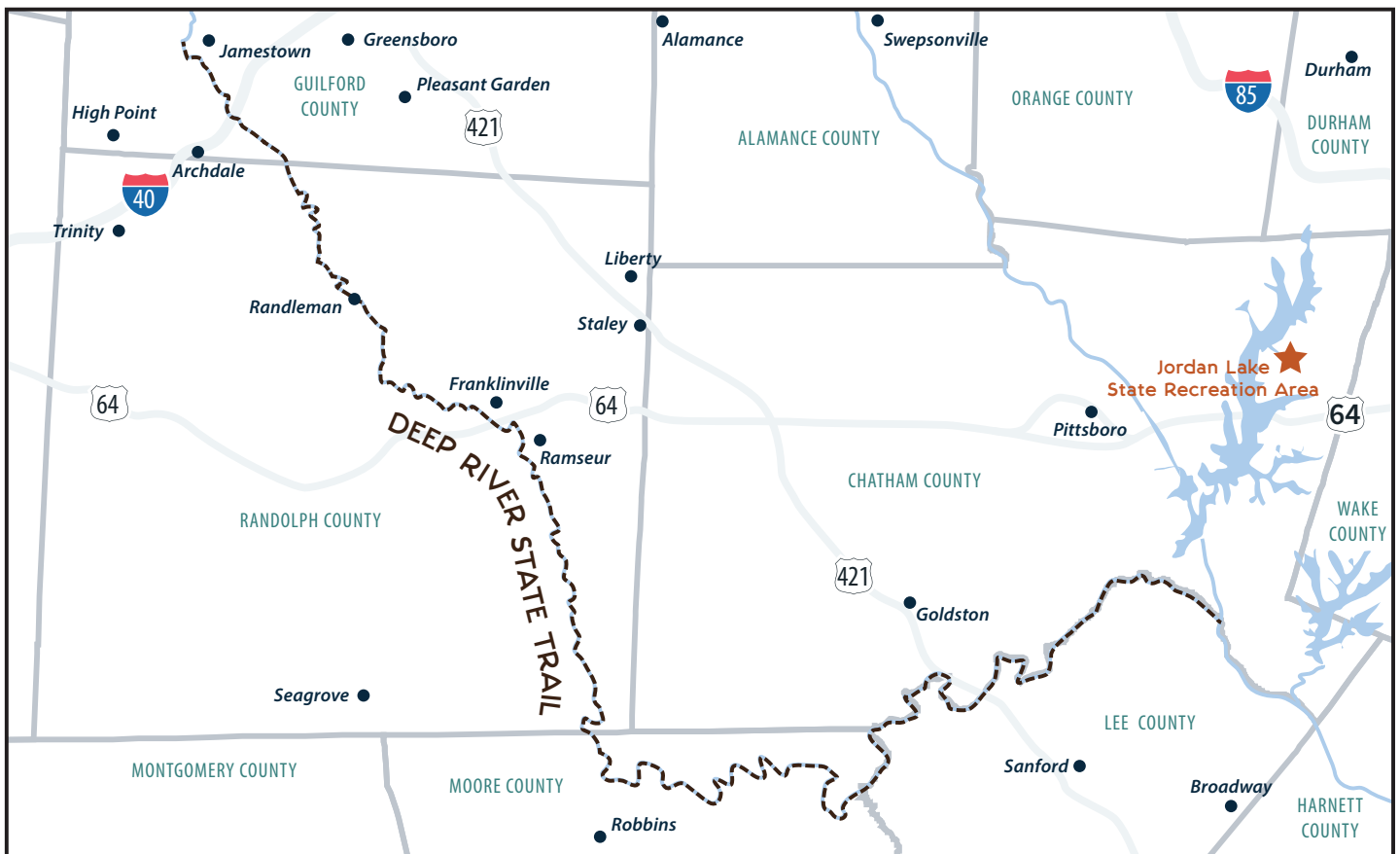
Capacity Building Fund Projects:

The PLC will use the capacity building funds for the DRST for establishing a trail coordinator position, mapping, and coordinating projects.

Priority CPT Projects:

The DRST priority projects are the trail section from Franklinville to Sapona and the section from Sapona to NC Textile Museum, including water access for the blueway.

Estimated cost for all priority projects	Over \$1 million
Estimated cost for all projects	Over \$1 million
CTP allocation	\$860,828
Total leveraged funds	\$1,949,000



LEGEND

- Planned Trail
- County Line
- City
- ★ State Park
- Water



4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



East Coast Greenway State Trail (EGST)

The East Coast Greenway State Trail is the North Carolina portion of a 3,000-mile greenway planned from Maine to Florida. In North Carolina, the EGST is planned to be 795 miles long and shaped like a large “V”— with one arm passing through Raleigh, Durham, and Fayetteville and the coastal section connecting Greenville and Jacksonville. The segments will meet in Wilmington. The East Coast Greenway Alliance (ECGA) is the trail partner for the EGST.

Fiscal Year Accomplishments:

The ECGA released a rolling Request for Project Proposals grant administration process with documentation this fiscal year. They also completed a feasibility study in Pender County. Through three grants from the NCDOT Integrated Mobility Division’s Feasibility Studies Paved Trail program, the alliance leveraged funds totaling \$334,750 to conduct feasibility segment studies in Granville, Johnston, and New Hanover counties.

For the Year of the Trail, the ECGA hosted five events with local communities. They also developed press releases and professional video and photo content to highlight the progress of the Complete the Trails Program.

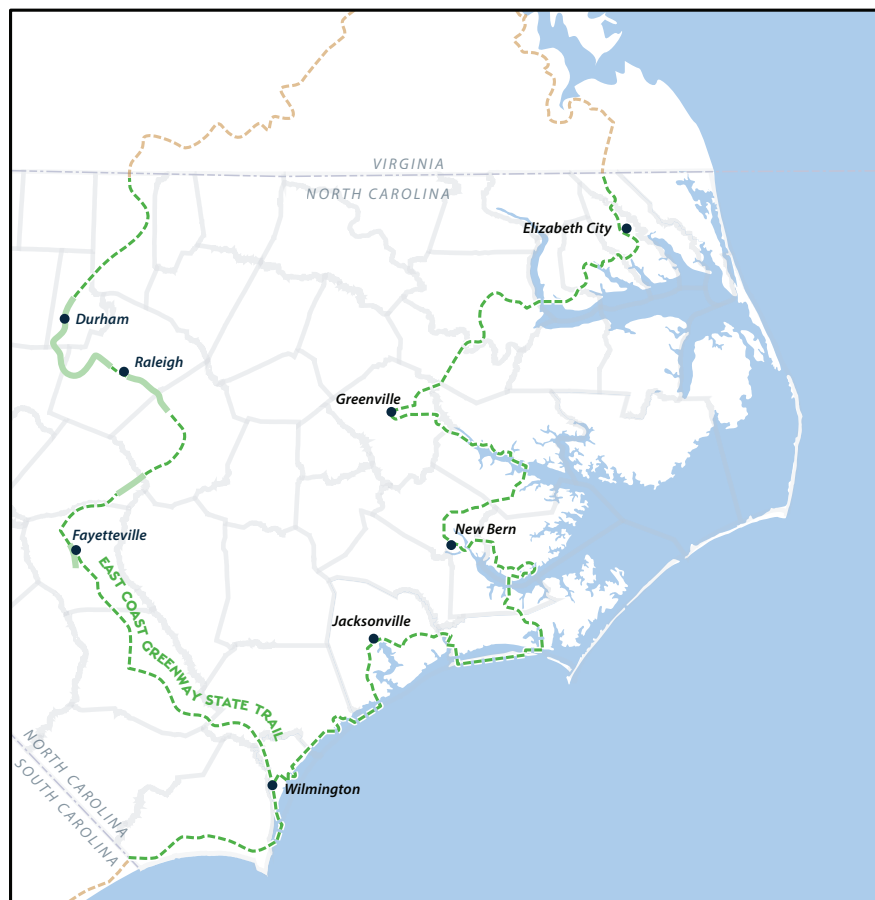
Capacity Building Funds:

The capacity building funds for the EGST will be utilized by the ECGA to compensate staff time, travel and meetings.

Priority CTP Projects:

The priority projects for the ECGA are planning and feasibility studies and four sections of trail: the Neuse River Trail (Phase 2), the Kure Beach Island Greenway, the Pine Knoll Shores/Bogue Banks Path, and the Dismal Swamp Canal Trail extension.

Estimated cost for top 5 priority projects	\$5 million
Estimated cost for 38 projects	\$933 million
CTP allocation	\$4,971,282

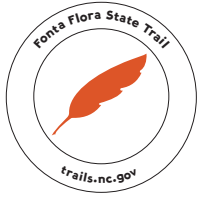


LEGEND

- Planned Trail
- Existing Trail
- County Line
- State Line
- City
- ~ Water



4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST)

Authorized in 2015, the Fonta Flora State Trail plans to connect Morganton to Asheville with a hiking and biking trail. Included in the trail is a loop around Lake James. The trail will traverse Lake James State Park, part of Pisgah National Forest and Fonta Flora County Park in Burke County. It will also connect to the Overmountain Victory and the Mountains-to-Sea state trails.

The trail is named after the local settlement of African American sharecroppers, whose homes were flooded when the Catawba River was dammed to create Lake James. The feather icon of this state trail was inspired by the national bird, the bald eagle. Artwork incorporating the feather has been used along the trail and at the trailheads, particularly in Burke County. When it is complete, the Fonta Flora State Trail will be approximately 100 miles long. The Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail (F3ST) is the trail partner for the FFST.

Fiscal Year Accomplishments:

The F3ST hired an outreach and development coordinator this fiscal year. They also received \$138,500 in grant funds for various projects.

The group has had a busy Year of the Trail, hosting 13 events with 126 participants and an estimated 625 impressions made. They kicked off the year with a First Day Hike on the South Wimba Loop Trail at Lake James State Park, and then held a hike and learn event at Rocky Ford Trail and a trail workshop and workday at Lake James also in January. The following month, the F3ST worked with the McDowell Trails Association to host a "Make a Date with a Trail" event, followed by a Trails festival in Burke County on March 11. In April, the friends group participated in the DNCR Trail Days event at Lake James State Park.

An annual member meeting was held at the Whipporwill Farm at the Fonta Flora Brewery in May. Later that month, they launched their 100-Mile Challenge with a meet and greet / hike and learn event at Fonta Flora County Park. The F3ST hosted the Fonta Flora Fun Run at the Old Fort Trails and Trains Festival on National Trails Day, and in July, they held a Vida Activa Hike on the McDowell Greenway with Centro Unido, a local nonprofit that serves local Latino families. They held another trail workshop and workday on July 15 at Burke County Park. They also hosted Power in Pints events in June and July, partnering with the Hillman Brewery in Morganton and Old Fort. They rounded out July with a guided hike at White Creek Bridge.

Capacity Building Funds:

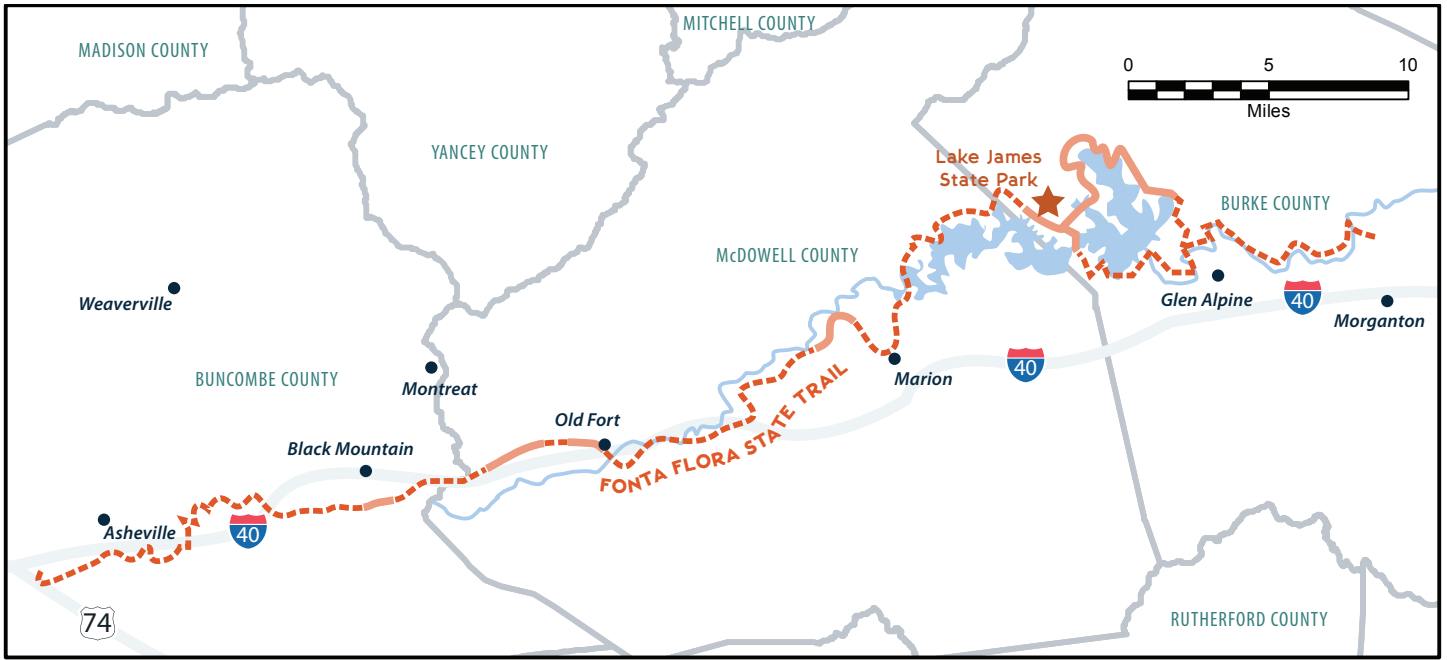
F3ST are using their capacity building funds to pay approximately 40% of the salary of a full-time executive director over fiscal years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The rest of the funding for the position will come from the support of their members and local municipalities.

Priority CTP Projects:

Most of the FFST priority projects are planned as partnership with other organizations. The F3ST are partnering with the Overmountain Victory North Carolina State Trail Friends group on the 0.2-mile Canal Bridge Project and on the 2.2-mile 1780/ Enclave Project. They are working with the Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina for easements and acquisitions on the 1.27-mile trail segment from Commerce Street to Copper Ridge Trailhead. Another segment from Copper Ridge to Point Lookout totaling 0.65 mile is a collaborative project with the U.S. Forest Service. Both the 1.27-mile and 0.65-mile trail are part of a feasibility study sponsored by the Dogwood Health Trust. In Asheville, they have partnered with Asheville Unpaved and the city to complete 1.29 miles of trail on the River Ridge Complex Project.

Estimated cost for all priority projects	\$700,000
Estimated cost for all projects	\$2.7 million
CTP allocation	\$502,150

4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



LEGEND

- Existing Trail
- Planned Trail
- County Line
- City
- State Park
- Water



4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



French Broad River State Trail (FBST)

The French Broad River State Trail was established in 1978 on the third oldest river in the world. The 117-mile blueway flows north from Rosman, NC to the Tennessee border, through Buncombe (including the heart of western North Carolina's largest city, Asheville), Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania counties. MountainTrue is the trail partner for the FBST.

Fiscal Year Accomplishments:

MountainTrue has hired a full-time French Broad Paddle Trail manager to lead the stewardship of the paddle trail and coordinate projects supported by the Complete the Trails Fund and other sources. They have also initiated several projects: the development of a new website, print map and signage for the paddle trail; the design of improvements for Champion Park River Access, Lyons Mountain River Access, Pisgah Forest River Access and Redmon Dam River Access; and the process to secure long-term public access at Nantahala Outdoor Center river access in Hot Springs.

MountainTrue has also made improvements to paddle trail campsites they manage, installing new picnic tables, fire rings and composting toilets. They hosted educational and celebratory float trips with local communities of color through MADE X MTNS' Outdoor Equity Fund grant.

For the Year of the Trail, the group has hosted public paddles and overnight guided trips to engage the public. They also held a forum and paddle in Madison County with river managers and water quality experts to discuss next current management, future challenges, and next steps for the French Broad.

Capacity Building Funds:

MountainTrue utilized their capacity building funds to hire a paddle trail recreation manager to oversee the implementation of the state funds, as well as organize and coordinate all aspects of managing the paddle trail. This work includes coordinating with partners, business and marketing planning, reservation system coordination, upkeep on access points and campsites, paddle trail guidebook management, and website upgrades.

Priority CTP Projects:

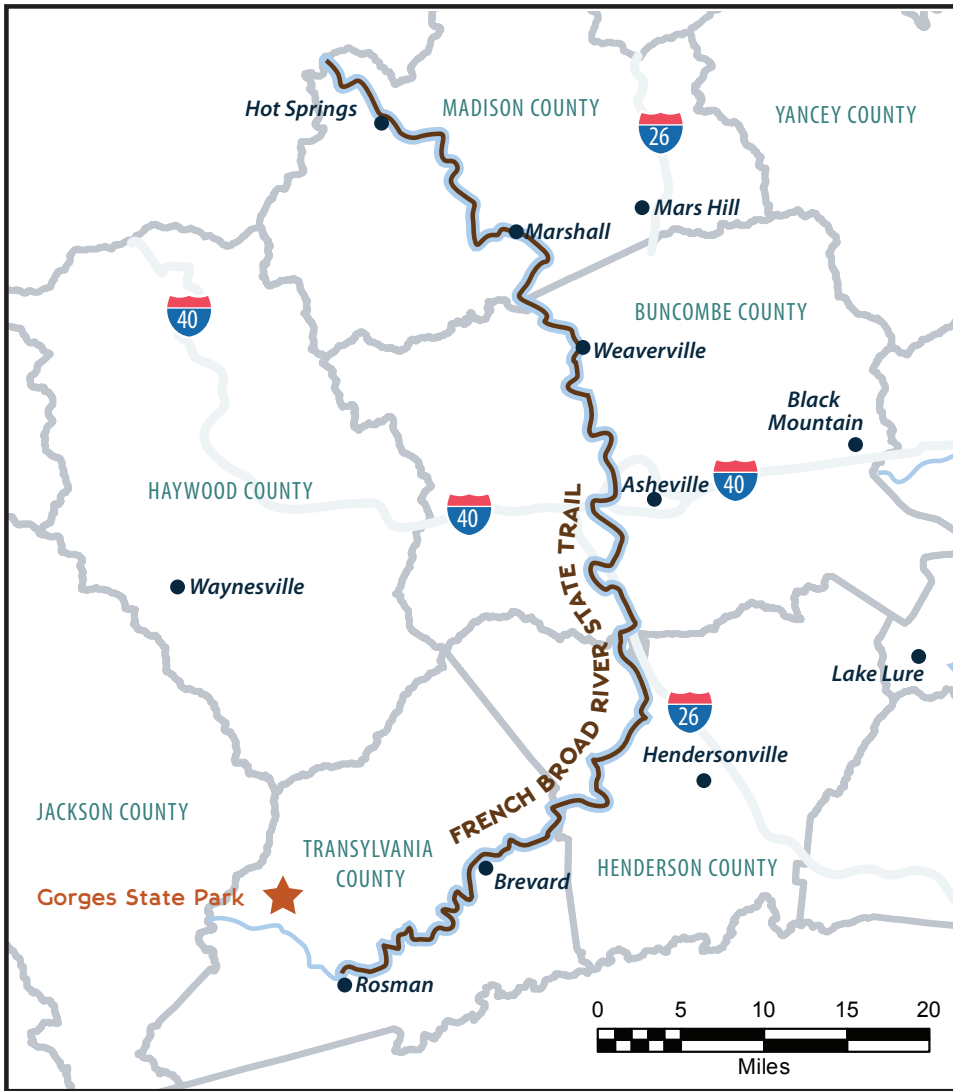
The FBST priority projects includes signage at river accesses and improvements to campsites along the blueway and to the Stackhouse access. MountainTrue also plans on adding a new river access in Transylvania County, leveraging funds from Transylvania County tourism development authority, Conserving Carolina, and the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. Finally, a project at Mud Creek will clear debris jams and add signage and new river access points.

Estimated cost for top 5 priority projects	\$177,000
Estimated cost for all projects	\$342,000
CTP allocation	\$210,375




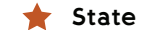



Float trip on the French Broad River State Trail with FIND Outdoors' Club de Exploradores

4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



LEGEND

-  Trail
-  County Line
-  City
-  State Park
-  Water



4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)

The Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail plans to connect with the Wilderness Gateway Trail near Buffalo Creek Park, and will meander through Rutherford, Henderson, and Buncombe Counties. It will connect to Chimney Rock State Park, Conserving Carolina's Upper Hickory Nut Gorge trails, and Town of Lake Lure's Buffalo Creek Park. Conserving Carolina is the trail partner for the HGST.

Fiscal Year Accomplishments:

Conserving Carolina has hired a trails and greenways coordinator to assist with land acquisition and trail development projects outlined in the 3-5 year plan for the HGST. They have also opened a 3-mile sustainably built Strawberry Gap Trail to the public. This trail connects to the Trombatore Trail at Blue Ridge Pastures and features views of the Hickory Nut Gorge. The trailhead has a gravel parking area for 25 cars and an information kiosk.

The Rutherford tourism development authority provided \$142,000 in funds to acquire 180-acres on Joel Ridge adjacent to Buffalo Creek Park/Weed Patch Mountain. The money will also fund the design and construction of more than 2 miles of new hiking & mountain biking trail on the property, which will be part of the HGST.

During the Year of the Trail, the Rock Crushers trail crew has conducted weekly trail maintenance workdays on the existing 38 miles of the HGST. Conserving Carolina also hosted Edneyville Elementary School and Muddy Sneakers in the Hickory Nut Gorge for hiking and education events.

This fiscal year, 11 segments of the HGST were designated; the trail now has 17.6 miles of designated trail.

Capacity Building Funds:

Conserving Carolina plans to use the capacity building funds to compensate for staff time to support HGST development during 2022 and 2023. Deliverables include trail and trailhead maintenance and management, state trail designation application development, grant management and landowner outreach.

Priority CTP Projects:

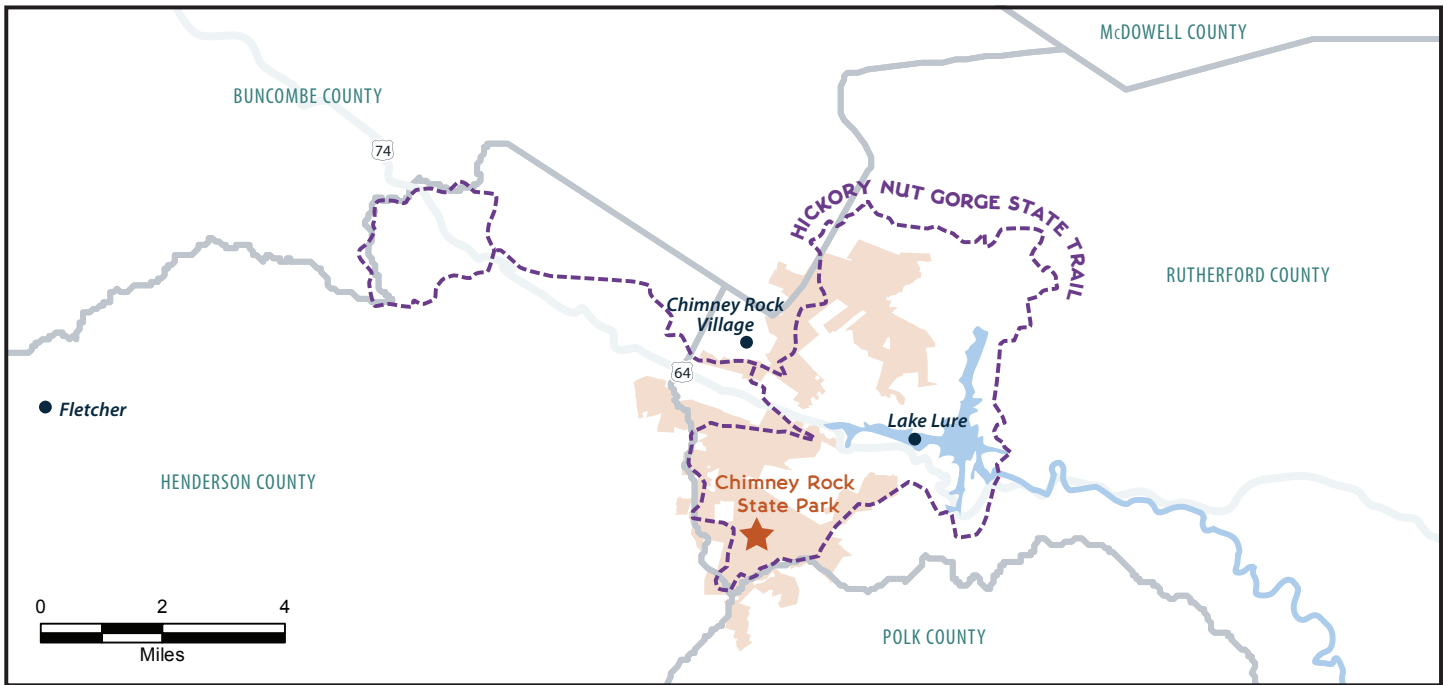
Most of the priority projects on the HGST involve Youngs Mountain. Conserving Carolina intends to purchase trailhead parcels and trail easements, construct 1.5 miles of trail and a new trailhead, add signage and blazing, and acquire additional tracts for the Youngs Mountain Trail. As part of the Youngs Mountain Phase 3 project, 2 miles of trail will be constructed to connect to the Buffalo Creek Park/Weed Patch Mountain Trailhead.

Estimated cost for top 5 priority projects	\$1 million
Estimated cost for all projects	\$1.6 million
CTP allocation	\$358,678



Ribbon-cutting event for the Strawberry Gap Trail, a future segment of the Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail

4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



LEGEND

- - - Planned Trail
- County Line
- ★ State Park
- City
- ~ Water



4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)

The Mountains-to-Sea State Trail, or the MST, is North Carolina's flagship state trail. The notion of a trail extending across the width of North Carolina was proposed in 1977 by Howard Lee, who was then the Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Natural Resources and Community Development (now DNCR). In 2000, the MST became a state trail and a unit of the state parks system. In 2017, the General Assembly authorized a major addition to the MST: the Coastal Crescent route that loops through southeastern North Carolina. The Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (FMST) is the trail partner for the MST.

Fiscal Year Accomplishments:

FMST has moved quickly on putting their CTP funds to work. They have built and opened a new bridge over the Jones Lake Drain at Turnbull Creek Educational State Forest, allowing for a new 1-mile section of the MST. They also opened a new trail in Surry County at Friendship Trailhead and in Guilford County on the Hines Chapel Preserve. At the Bentonville Battlefield State Historic, a new 1-mile section of trail opened in 2023. In Alamance County, the friends group and local partners have begun construction on a new trail as well.

The fiscal year was a busy one for land acquisitions and easements. Using CTP funds, the FMST assisted in the acquisition of the Shoebuckle Property in Stokes County as a site for a future piece of the MST. They also signed an easement to allow a new MST section between Elkin and Interstate 77. At Holly Shelter Game Land in Pender County, FMST successfully acquired 1,600 acres of land for conservation and to extend the trail there; the group partnered with The Nature Conservancy, Marine Corps Base Camp LeJeune, and the North Carolina Land and Water Fund on the acquisition.

Other projects this fiscal year include continued construction and installation of new MST trailhead kiosks. At Jockey's Ridge State Park, a new monument will mark the eastern terminus of the MST. FMST also signed a CTP agreement with the Division to reroute part of the state trail in Linville Gorge.

The group also accomplished several outreach initiatives. The MST is now on the FarOut app, which bills itself as "the No. 1 navigational app for the best long-distance trails in the world." They hosted their annual Gathering of Friends event in Durham. FMST also continued their outreach efforts to underrepresented communities to raise awareness of the state trail.

The Year of the Trail was a timely occasion for the MST, which turns 45 in September. FMST assisted with the DNCR Trail Days weekend event in Bladen County and had a group of MST volunteers visiting every other Trail Days events and Year of the Trail festivals.

Capacity Building Funds:

FMST is using the capacity building funds to add a new staff person to help increase organizational visibility, help manage and expand volunteer efforts, sustain, and grow its membership, build relationships with stakeholders in key areas and organize celebratory events when new sections of trail open.

Priority CTP Projects:

Priority projects include land acquisition and new trail construction at Bushy Lake State Natural Area, which could add nearly 18 miles of new trail to the MST. FMST is also looking at land acquisition and trail construction at the North River Wetlands and the Holly Shelter Game Land. They will develop a trail along the Dan River from Danbury to Oak Ridge. And finally, they are planning for a new segment of the MST to connect Hanging Rock State Park to downtown Danbury.

Estimated cost for top 5 priority projects	\$3.1 million
Estimated cost for all projects	\$7.8 million
CTP allocation	\$5,086,059

4.0 State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



LEGEND

- Existing Trail
- - - Planned Trail
- County Line
- City



Workday for a new segment of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail at Bentonville State Historic Site

4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)

Northern Peaks State Trail will connect Boone, Elk Knob State Park, and Mount Jefferson State Natural Area. The planning corridor is approximately 40 miles long, beginning in Boone and ending at Mount Jefferson in Ashe County. Blue Ridge Conservancy (BRC) is the trail partner for NPST.

Fiscal Year Accomplishments:

This fiscal year was busy for the BRC and the NPST. The Northern Peaks Executive Committee was formed and its inaugural meeting was held in March 2023. BRC also received \$112,000 in private donations and identified 2 parcels for potential acquisition on The Peak.

At Three Top Mountain, dedications were amended for the game lands to allow for NPST construction. BRC began planning the Three Top Mountain segment of the trail and an environmental review, while the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program completed a biological survey of the mountain. The group is now awaiting final quote for trail design and building.

Planning also began for Paddy Mountain, with new trail construction to begin in fall 2023 at Paddy Mountain Park. WBTV, the CBS affiliate in Charlotte, shot a segment on the park. BRC successfully applied and received a \$100,000 RTP grant, and they have applied for a \$500,000 Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) grant. They are now awaiting engineer's proposal for infrastructure and trail design.

In Elk Knob State Park, the Natural Heritage Program completed a biological survey of the north side of the park. The park also received \$3.4 million from PARTF for a new 4.5-mile loop, Summit Trail renovations, south side trail, parking, restrooms, bridge, and trailhead. Planning for the NPST segment for the park is underway.

Also this fiscal year, the BRC presented to Boone Town Council about Rivers Street Park Trail/NPST trailhead and received a resolution of support. They are applying for a Blue Ridge Energy Members Foundation grant for the trail design at River Street Park. BRC also facilitated a \$1,000 contribution from the Boone Town Council; Boone is now part of the Great Trail State Coalition.

Community engagement and support efforts were successful for the BRC, as they acquired resolutions of support from West Jefferson, Jefferson, Boone, Ashe County, and Watauga County. They have engaged with local municipal and county planners, managers, mayors, boards, tourism development authorities, parks and recreation directors, and state parks employees; the group said they have successfully formed a close relationship with at least one member of every local board pertinent to the future of the NPST.

For the Year of the Trail, the BRC assisted the Town of West Jefferson in hosting a DNCR Trail Days weekend. The group also presented to High Country Council of Government about NPST and Year of the Trail. Lastly, all local governments along the NPST trail planning corridor have signed Year of the Trail proclamations.

Capacity Building Funds:

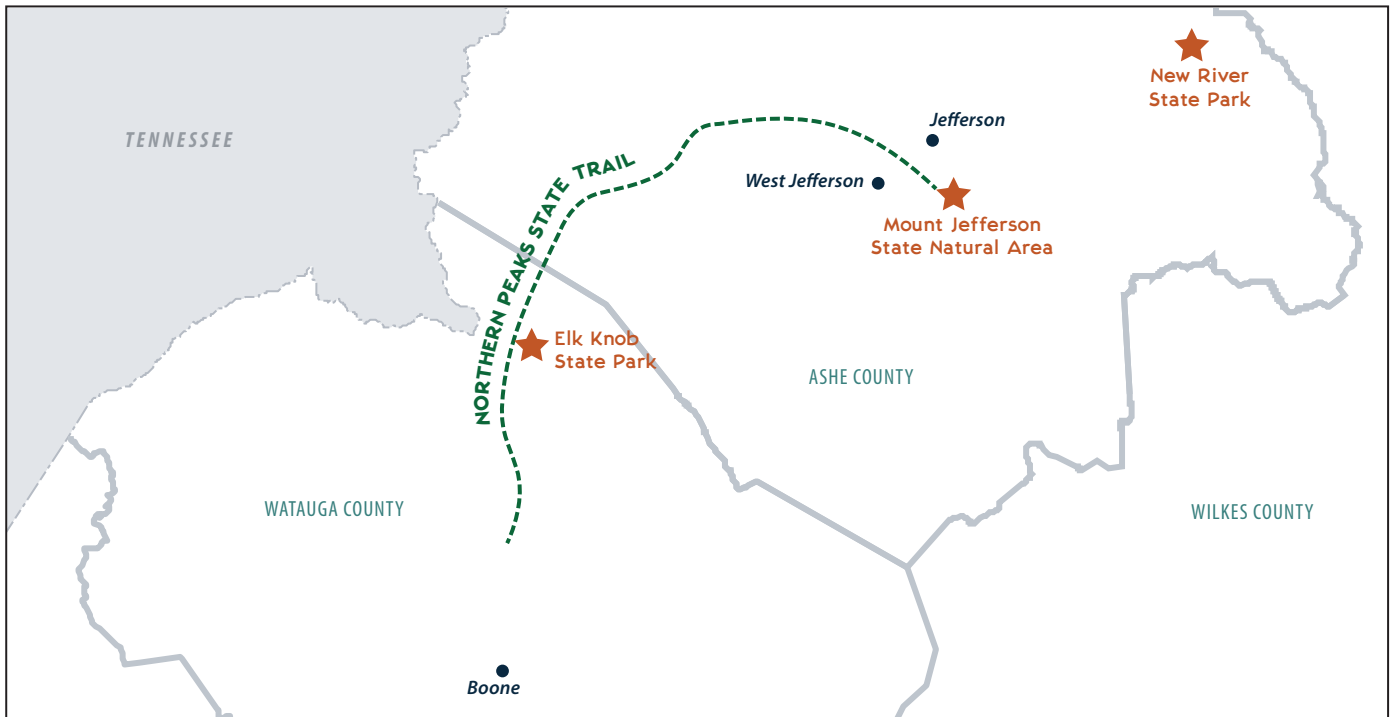
BRC increased staff capacity to plan, design, construct and maintain the Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST). A new trails staff position was created by leveraging additional funds with the capacity building grant. This staff position is the main contact for the NPST and will partner with the Division, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, NC Plant Conservation Program, Ashe County, Watauga County, West Jefferson, Jefferson, Boone, and private landowners to create the NPST. The trails coordinator assists with the biological study, general trail alignment and management of trail construction projects.

Priority CTP Projects:

The priorities for the NPST are to construct 4 miles of new trail and rehabilitate 2 miles existing trail at Elk Knob State Park, as well as construct one new parking area. At Three Top Mountain Game Land, BRC plans to construct, upgrade two existing parking areas and construct one new parking area. CTP funds must be leveraged to help with trail construction and parking facilities. The group is also looking to leverage CTP funds to acquire land, particularly along the proposed trail corridor from Snake Mountain to Mount Jefferson.

Estimated cost for all priority projects	\$6.2 million
Estimated cost for all projects	Over \$6.2 million
CTP allocation	\$286,943

4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



LEGEND

- - - Planned Trail
- County Line
- ★ State Park
- City



Scouting trail options for the Northern Peaks State Trail

4.0 State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



Overmountain Victory State Trail (OVST)

The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail stretches roughly 330 miles from its southern terminus in South Carolina through North Carolina and into Tennessee and Virginia and follows the paths that the patriot militia took as they mustered to fight the Battle of Kings Mountain in 1780. This battle proved to be pivotal in the Revolutionary War. The Overmountain Victory State Trail will follow the 225 miles of the planned route of the National Historic Trail that passes through North Carolina. The trail partner for the OVST is the OVNCST-Friends.

Fiscal Year Accomplishments:

Cathey’s Plantation trail along Grassy Creek in Mitchell County, the encampment of the Overmountain Men on September 28, 1780, was the first section of the Overmountain Victory State Trail certified by DNCR Secretary D. Reid Wilson on April 20, 2023.

For the Year of the Trail, the friends group is assisting partners to have all existing National Parks Service-certified sections of trail designated as state trail.

Capacity Building Funds:

OVNCST-Friends are using their capacity building funds to hire a part-time executive director to complete administrative duties and cover administrative costs for fiscal years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. Funding will also be used to develop a website to increase awareness of the organization and trail and fund a contractor for project development and oversight services as needed.

Priority CTP Projects:

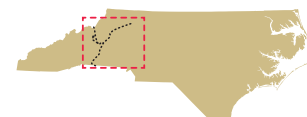
The friends group is focusing on creating master plans for two sections: from the North Carolina state line to Spruce Pine and from W. Kerr Scott Reservoir to Lenoir. Other priorities are a 0.25-mile trail at Norris Recreation Complex, as part of its Phase I; a 0.75-mile trail at Cub Creek Connector; and the Smoot Park Trailhead Gateway. They are also working with the F3ST and Burke County on the 3.5-mile Black Bear Project.

Estimated cost for top 5 priority projects	\$550,000
Estimated cost for all projects	\$3 million
CTP allocation	\$1,614,053



LEGEND

- - - Trail
- County Line
- City
- ★ State Park
- ~ Water



4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)

Authorized in 2021, the Roanoke River State Trail is a paddle trail extending from Weldon to the Albemarle Sound. Meandering through the coastal plain for 132 miles, this paddle trail offers a unique wilderness experience to all who venture along its length. While there are some opportunities for day trips on either end of the river, most paddlers need to be prepared for a multiday journey on this state trail. Riverside camping platforms make spending the night along the river a true adventure.

The tent in the RRST blaze is reminiscent of the camping platforms that are available (reservations are required) along the wilder stretches of the Roanoke. Roanoke River Partners (RRP) is the partner for this trail.

Fiscal Year Accomplishments:

The RRP has used their CTP funds to renovate 12 campsite platforms. They have also cleaned up and prepared for upcoming renovations of the Rosenwald School, which will serve as the future RRST headquarters/community center and museum.

For the Year of the Trail, the RRST was included in the PBS series "10 to Try." RRP also participated in several festivals: the NC Herring Festival at Martin County at the end of March, NC Bear Festival at Washington County on the weekend of June 3, and Bertie County's Riverfest on June 17.

Capacity Building Funds:

Capacity building funds are being used to support a regional and a paddle trail coordinator. Duties of this coordinator will include program development and administration, maintenance of records and documents related to Complete the Trail Fund projects on the RRST, volunteer recruitment and training, marketing and communications, search for additional grant funding, and promotion of the paddle trail.

Priority CTP Projects:

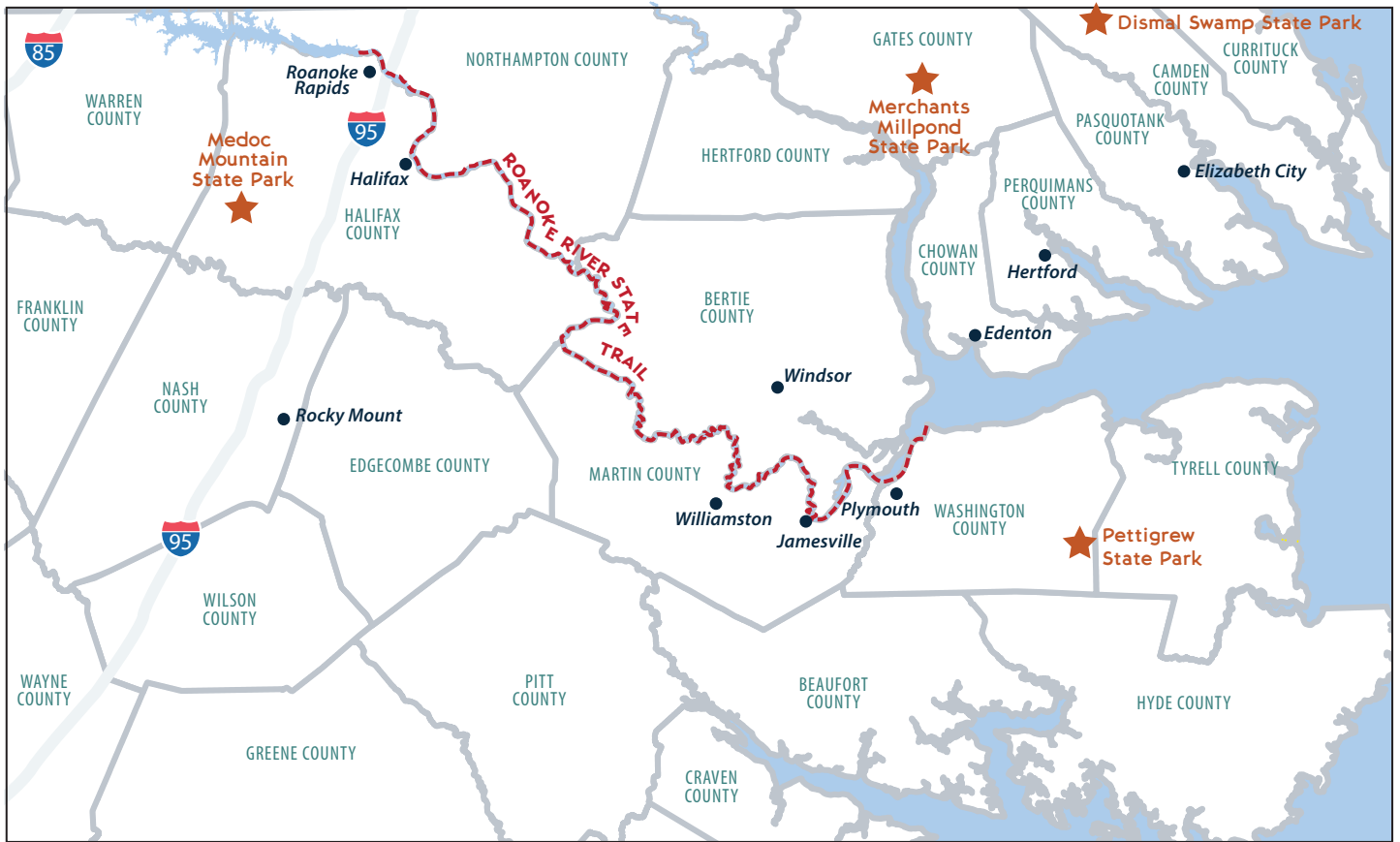
The top priority for the RRST is to repair and renovate camping platforms along the blueway. RRP is also looking at construction of campsites at mile markers 35, 44, 50 and 85, as well as a boat ramp, floating dock and kayak rack at mile marker 72, near the town of Hamilton. Finally, Rosenwald Visitor Center is planned also at mile marker 72.

Estimated cost for priority projects	\$1.03 million
Estimated cost for all projects	Over \$1 million
CTP allocation	\$507,375



A Complete the Trails Program project in progress at Cypress Cathedral on the Roanoke River State Trail

4.0 State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



LEGEND

- - - Planned Trail
- County Line
- ~ Water
- ★ State Park
- City
- Highway



4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)

The Wilderness Gateway State Trail will wind through Catawba and Burke counties and along the border of Rutherford and McDowell counties for 170 miles. Part of this trail will include a paddle trail in Catawba County. The planned trail will connect Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail and South Mountains State Park with the towns of Valdese and Hickory. Part of the trail will follow the same route as the Overmountain Victory State Trail. Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina (FCNC) is the Partner for the WGST.

Fiscal Year Accomplishments:

FCNC has hired a new Trails Program director and has leveraged \$126,000 in additional grant funds. Eleven miles of new trail have been flagged on the WGST, and phase 1 of an archaeological survey has been completed.

During the Year of the Trail, FCNC has led five guided hikes and outings and hosted 17 volunteer workdays.

Capacity Building Funds:

FCNC used their capacity building funds to hire a full-time WGST trail program manager to oversee trail planning, alignment, and construction projects. They also want to use it to develop and maintain partnerships and relationships with stakeholders and volunteers. They especially want to grow the FCNC volunteer program, recruiting 1 volunteer per mile of trail built and provide volunteer trainings.

Priority CTP Projects:

The WGST priority projects are on segments 2 and 6. On segment 2, FCNC is looking to acquire land in the Pinnacle Mountains West area and conduct trail planning and alignment at both east and west areas of the Pinnacles. In addition to CTP money, they are looking to leverage funds through grant programs like the NC Land and Water Fund, the Rutherford County Trails Collaborative, and donated land value. Segment 6 projects also involve land acquisition; FCNC wants to acquire land on the Prospect Ridge property. In addition, they want to plan, align and construct trails on the Henry Fork River Preserve and Smiths Cliffs, both FCNC properties. As with the segment 2 projects, they also hope to receive additional support from RTP grants, donated land value, and private funds.

Estimated cost for top 5 priority projects	\$1.4 million
Estimated cost for all projects	\$10.2 million
CTP allocation	\$1,219,506

4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



LEGEND

- - - Planned Trail
- ★ State Park
- County Line
- City



4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)

The Yadkin River State Trail was established in 1985. The blueway extends for 162 miles through Wilkes, Surry, Yadkin, Forsyth, Davie, Davidson, Rowan, Stanly, and Montgomery counties. The Yadkin River is one of the longest rivers in North Carolina, originating near the Blue Ridge Parkway and flowing east and south until it joins with the Uwharrie River to form the Pee Dee River.

The state trail starts in the tailrace of the W. Kerr Scott Dam and extends all the way to Morrow Mountain State Park. The Yadkin Riverkeeper (YRK) is the partner for the YRST.

Fiscal Year Accomplishments:

The YRK has done a lot of outreach to promote the YRST. They finalized online and printed maps and updated river access resources/maps on their website, as well as designed, printed, and distributed 1,000 marketing brochures for the state trail.

They have also made strides in getting segment designated by the DNCR Secretary. YRK conducted site visits at all 17 existing Yadkin River State Trail (YRST) access areas with the state trail planner last fall. Subsequently, they worked with access site land managers to complete and submit 12 access area designation applications. Officially designated access areas include Kerr Scott Reservoir Tailwater, Smoot Park, and Roaring River in Wilkes County; Crater Park in Surry County; Yadkin Shores, Shoals Road, and Bob Pate/Huntsville in Yadkin County; Old U.S. 421 and Tanglewood Park in Forsyth County; and U.S. Hwy 64, Boone's Cave, and York Hill/Yadkin River Park in Davidson County.

The YRK has also started to utilize the CTP funds; they submitted a land acquisition grant application for \$69,050 to acquire land associated with the Burch Station access at the confluence of the Yadkin and Mitchell Rivers, working partnership with the Surry County Parks and Recreation Department. At closing, the land would be transferred to Surry County for permanent public river access. Once complete, Surry County and YRK will submit an application to designate the area as an official YRST public access area.

They also committed \$22,500 in CTP funds to construct a boat ramp at the Wilkes County Roaring River Access/Riverside Park. The project recently received a \$475,000 PARTF grant, and design and construction will start next year. YRK anticipates they will be submitting a scope of work for that project in the first quarter of 2024.

Along the designated trail segments, the YRK has began placing signage that were produced with funding from the Shallow Ford Foundation's Shore Community Grant Program, leveraging almost \$5,000. The group needed to first finalize a design for YRST mile marker signs and also formalize agreements with eight landowners in Yadkin County to place the signage. The YRK hopes to place 13 signs by the end of 2023.

As part of the Year of the Trail, YRK has held guided paddles at Pilot Mountain State Park and on the Daniel Boone Heritage Canoe Trail. They also organized site visits and met with Wilkes County officials, land trust representatives, community leaders and landowners to assess community support and the feasibility of extending the YRST designation above Kerr Scott Reservoir through Happy Valley to Patterson, which would add approximately 28 miles of paddle trail the YRST. After visiting the potential new access, they sought public input from the community as part of their "Yakin' on the Yadkin" celebration, which coincided with the Happy Valley Fiddlers' Convention.

Capacity Building Funds:

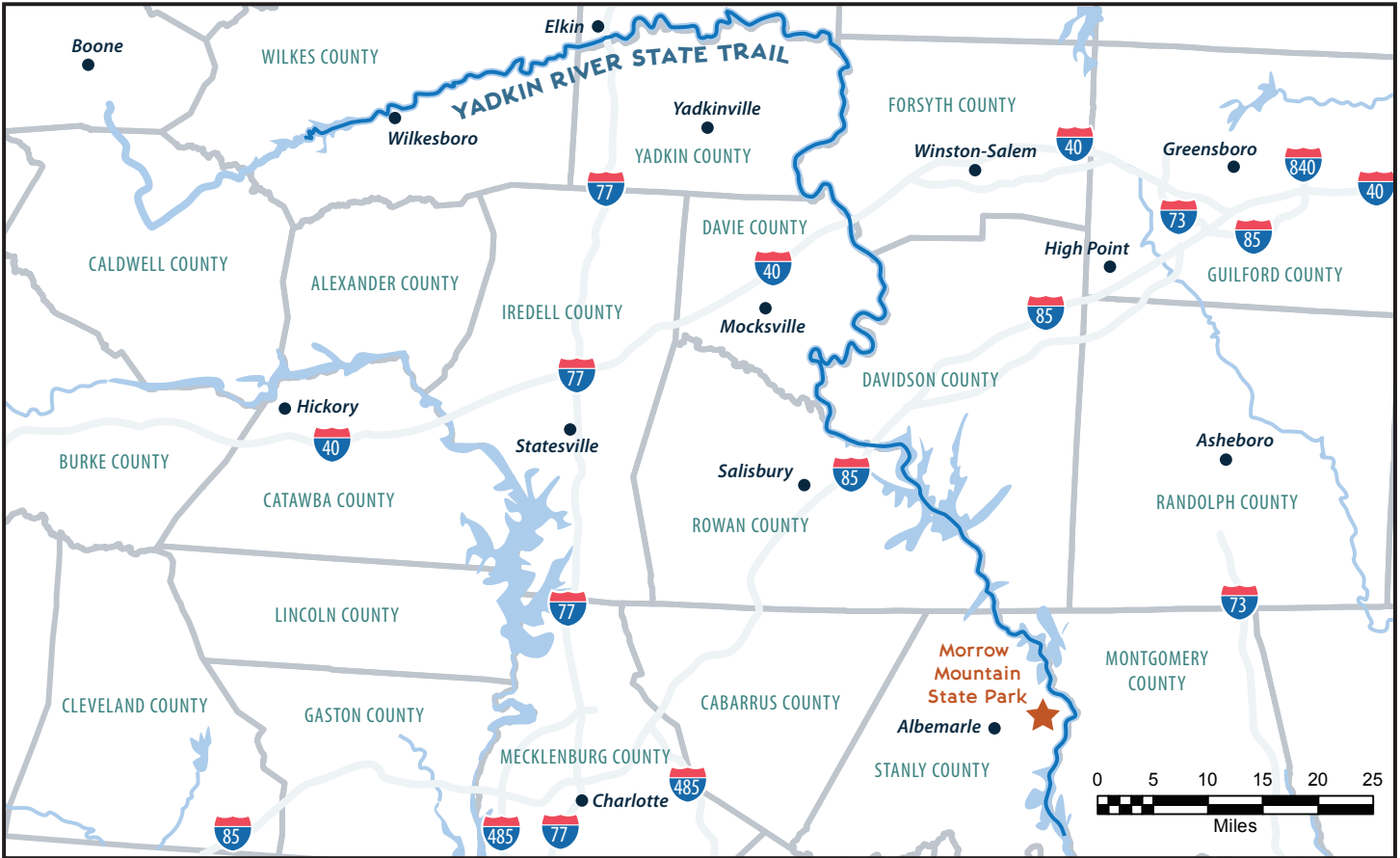
The YRK used the capacity building funds to work with public and nonprofit partners to develop and implement a plan to allocate a portion of the (CTP) funds to access area improvements. They also developed grant proposals for access area land acquisition/improvement projects, facilitated the placement of mile markers and access area signage, and promoted the YRST through their website, social media and Historic Paddle Series.

Priority CTP Projects:

Having been a state trail for decades, the YRST has numerous accesses already built, and thus, the priority projects are to improve on those access areas. A site at Pilot Mountain State Park along the Ararat River near its confluence with the YRST will hopefully see better access roads and site developments. At the Rockford access, the YRK is looking to improve the access infrastructure by putting in a ramp or steps, and with the help of the PLC and Surry County, they hope to leverage other grant programs to supplement funding. The other priority projects — purchasing YRST mile marker signs, updating and maintaining online map and website, and developing trail brochures — have already begun this fiscal year.

Estimated cost for priority projects	\$205,00
Estimated cost for all projects	Over \$205,000
CTP allocation	\$210,375

4.O State Trails and Complete the Trail Program



LEGEND

- Trail
- County Line
- ★ State Park
- City
- ~ Water



5.0 Actions for the Future of the Great Trails State

NC Trails Program Recommendations

■ Evaluate State Transportation Funding Limitations

N.C.G.S. 136-189.11(d)(3)(c) prohibits the use of state funds for independent bicycle and pedestrian projects, even as a match for federal funds. This provision significantly hinders the development of greenways, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This prohibition should be evaluated to determine if it continues to be in the best interests of the citizens of North Carolina.

■ Provide State Funding for a Trail Grant Program

The NC Trails Program continues to receive more than twice as many applications for trail and greenway funding as the federal Recreational Trails Program grants is able to fund. Additional state funding to supplement federal funding would facilitate and expedite the completion of trails and greenways.

■ Re-Establish the Adopt-a-Trail Program

Under N.C.G.S. 143B-135.112, this program was previously funded to provide small trail grants to communities and nonprofits, but funding was discontinued in 2014. Additional funding would foster opportunities to fund trail projects beyond the federal Recreational Trails Program. This funding could be administered through the NC Trails Program and utilize the structure of the Adopt-a-Trail Program or create a new trails grant program for the state. Although significant new funding was provided through the Complete the Trail Program, this funding cannot be used on trail projects that are not affiliated with state trails.

■ Provide Recurring Funding for State Trails

The capacity building funds for the state trail partner organizations would benefit from being recurring so that the organizations can continue to focus on developing the state trails.

■ Allocate Budget with State Trail Authorization

Any new state trail that is authorized should have a budget allocation to allow for initial development and should be planned to be at least 100 miles long. Trail concepts considered for state trail authorization should be in areas of the state not currently served by a state trail.

Opportunities for Collaboration

■ Add Safety Signage for Paddle Trails

DNCR and NCDOT need to develop an MOU to provide safety signage on bridges that span paddle trails throughout North Carolina. At a minimum, the signage should identify the roadway, the paddle trail, and any portages that are nearby downstream.

■ Continue Partnership with the Great Trails State Coalition

The Great Trails State Coalition is a group of land conservancies, trails and environmental organizations, and industry partners formed to promote trails in North Carolina. The Division should continue to advise and coordinate with the Coalition, especially in promoting NC as the Great Trails State.

■ Develop Strategic Planning

The NC Trails Program should continue to partner with NCDOT's Integrated Mobility Division to identify priority corridors for state and regional trails in a strategic plan for a statewide network of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations that will link county seats, state parks, state trails, community colleges, and state/national forests. This plan should address criteria for including pedestrian and bicycle accommodations on all non-interstate highway bridge replacements.

The Great Trails State network is planned as a system of multiuse trails. A multiuse path surface is inappropriate for specific state trails, such as the Northern Peaks State Trail. In those cases, the spine network will connect to trailheads. NCDOT's Great Trails State plan will facilitate many aspects of planning and construction of state trails in the future.

■ Formalize and Coordinate Partnerships

The Division should continue to strengthen and formalize partnerships with the various organizations that support state trails. Additionally, the Division should coordinate with these organizations to recognize and support the volunteers who labor to construct and maintain the state trails.

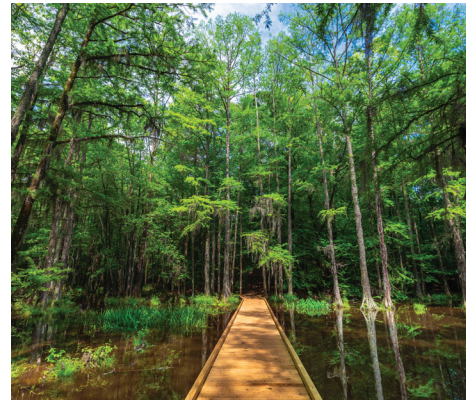
5.0 Actions for the Future of the Great Trails State



Mayo River State Park



Mount Jefferson State Natural Area



Merchants Millpond State Park

Priorities for the Next Fiscal Year

■ Technical Assistance and Trail Education

The NC Trails Program will continue to seek opportunities for technical trail building education, so those skills may be passed on to other partners and Division staff to assist with efficiently tackling trail projects in the future. The Program will continue to provide technical assistance for trail design, maintenance, and sustainability to local communities and state parks.

■ Comprehensive Trail Assessments

In 2022, a long-held goal of conducting parkwide trail assessments began. These assessments began in the mountain region of the state, with the goal of expanding the initiative throughout the state. This allows for efficient and objective identification of trail needs and project prioritization. This endeavor was made possible with a partnership with Conservation Corps North Carolina's Individual Placement program, which placed a full-time Trail Assessment Technician with the Trails Program for the 2022-2023 year, with the goal of continuing this partnership.

■ Trail Usage Monitoring and Data Collection

The See Insights digital visitor counters that have been installed throughout the NC state parks system have continued to produce better accuracy for visitation counts. See Insights, LLC, a Raleigh-based company that developed the prototype at William B. Umstead State Park over several years, has continued to improve the counter technology to increase the accuracy of the data collected. It also has several concepts that are expected to be implemented in the near future. The counters collect precise numbers on trail usage, including times, dates, and the outdoor temperature when collected.

This information has helped the Division analyze trail utilization patterns such as heavy usage periods and seasonal changes. The data has also assisted in anticipating various management needs of trails in each park. Staff have used the information to illustrate the important role trails play regionally in supporting healthy lifestyles and providing recreational opportunities. As the Division's parks and trails continue to grow in popularity, these counters' accuracy has helped the Division to better understand visitor use patterns within parks. This in turn has enabled the Division to better plan for future facilities and to make changes to better operate state parks.

6.0

State Parks Partnership with Conservation Corps NC (CCNC)



CCNC/NC Parks Trail Technician Arey Clark building new trail at Lake James State Park



CCNC Crew member repairing rock work on the Summit Trail at Elk Knob State Park



CCNC Crews build a trail from the newly constructed Visitor's Center at Lake James State Park



CCNC crews construct the Fox Trail at Mayo River State Park



CCNC crews construct connector trails to the new Eno River State Park visitor center

In the fiscal year 2022-2023, the Division used recurring funds appropriated in the 2021 State Budget to establish a partnership with the Conservation Corps North Carolina (CCNC) to support trail work. A program of Conservation Legacy, CCNC is a corps program that engages North Carolina's young adults in conservation service projects that benefit local communities. The partnership is also supported by an AmeriCorps grant from the North Carolina Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service.

In its fourth year, the partnership has vastly improved trail sustainability in state parks while providing diverse young adults a paid job, valuable on-the-job training, and an AmeriCorps education award. Crews of six to eight AmeriCorps members tackled various trail projects under training and direction from Trails Specialists. From July 2022 to June 2023, crews completed projects at Cliffs of the Neuse, Eno River, Lake James, Mayo River, Medoc Mountain, and Pettigrew state parks. Accomplished work included trail maintenance, new trail construction, deconstruction of dilapidated structures, and decommissioning unsustainable trail segments.

CCNC 2022-2023 State Park Projects

- **Cliffs of the Neuse State Park:** CCNC finished approximately 1.1 miles of the newly rerouted Spanish Moss Trail after it was roughed in by DPR staff. CCNC re-naturalized approximately 600 linear feet of the decommissioned sections of the Spanish Moss Trail.
- **Eno River State Park:** CCNC constructed approximately 500 linear feet of the new Laurel Bluff Trail. DPR maintenance staff constructed a new 20-foot bridge crossing the creek and connecting to the newly constructed trail. CCNC also finished approximately 1,650 linear feet of a relocated Cox Mountain Trail after it was initially roughed in by Division staff. In addition, approximately 1,000 linear feet of decommissioned trail was re-naturalized, which involved removing many old wood steps.
- **Lake James State Park:** CCNC completed the last remaining 300 linear feet of the South Wimba Loop Trail, which once completed became a new segment of the Fonta Flora State Trail. CCNC also spent several hitches clearing the future trail corridors of trees and vegetation and constructing nearly a mile of new trail from the new park visitor center. Once completed, the trails will offer users beautiful, undeveloped views of Lake James. Finally, the CCNC conducted routine trail maintenance along the Tindo and Wimba Loop mountain bike trails.
- **Mayo River:** CCNC finished approximately 5,500 linear feet of the new Fox Trail after being roughed in by Division staff.
- **Medoc Mountain:** CCNC completed approximately 500 linear feet of beginner mountain bike trails on the Weller Loop Trail.
- **Pettigrew:** CCNC distributed 9 tons of gravel along the Moccasin Trail.

CCNC Individual Placement Program – Trail Assessment Technician

In November 2022, through CCNC's Individual Placement program, the Trails Program hired an 11-month Trails Assessment Technician to assist with the thorough and challenging task of conducting a comprehensive assessment of the state parks trail system. The position is currently based in the mountains and assisting the regional trails specialist. This position assesses the condition of trails throughout state parks, conducts onsite data collection and recommendations, assists with trail layout and design, and facilitates CCNC trail crew projects. The additional field staff has also allowed for better reporting of on-the-ground conditions, which allows for quick deployment of trail crews for repairs. Data compiled from the assessments improves the identification and prioritization of trail projects through objective measures. In addition, the technician benefits from learning a broad range of skills that will prepare them for a variety of natural resources jobs and careers. With over 700 miles of trails throughout state parks and only three regional trails staff, positions such as these temporarily provide much-needed assistance. Ultimately, the Trails Program would benefit from more permanent positions that could continue to support trail monitoring and project development.

7.0

Recreational Trails Program (RTP)



Inspecting a newly constructed and RTP-funded reroute of the popular Schoolhouse Ridge mountain bike trail with U.S. Forest Service Grandfather District Recreation Manager Lisa Jennings.



View from the Strawberry Gap Trail in Gerton, NC – a RTP-funded project and a future segment of the Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail. Project completed by Conserving Carolina.



New RTP-funded reroute of the Mt. Mitchell Trail in Burnsville, NC, and segment of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail

The Division manages the federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP) for the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. RTP leverages local funds to develop trails and trail-related recreational amenities to provide low-cost infrastructure and economic development opportunities through natural resource tourism.

From 1999 to 2023, the Division has received approximately \$78,840,664 in requests for RTP funding. Of those requests, the state has awarded \$42,295,443 to sustainable RTP trail projects statewide. These RTP funds, combined with in-kind services and matching funds totaling \$70,694,941, have been applied to trail and greenway projects for the citizens of North Carolina.

RTP is currently enabled by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021, which reauthorized the program from fiscal years 2022 through 2026 as a set-aside from the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside under the Surface Transportation Block Grant. RTP funding comes from the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) through the North Carolina Department of Transportation and is administered by the Division's Trails Program. Since 1993, RTP funding in North Carolina has been used to provide recreational opportunities for hikers, equestrians, bicyclists, paddlers, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) users. Funding through RTP has been able to move forward through continuing resolutions.

The Division received 21 RTP final application requests totaling \$1,960,860 for the 2023 grant year. In North Carolina, Trails Program staff request applicants submit applications several months prior to review by the North Carolina Trails Committee (NCTC) so that applicants receive comments and suggestions. This process has resulted in higher quality, shovel-ready projects presented to the NCTC. Grant applications are reviewed and recommended for funding by the NCTC, a citizen board established in N.C.G.S. 113A-88. The NCTC recommended awards for 17 RTP construction projects totaling \$1,560,860.70 to leverage \$2,051,106.78 of grantee matching funds. These awards will benefit the following counties: Alamance, Ashe, Buncombe, Burke, Carteret, Cleveland, Craven, Davidson, Haywood, Jackson, Martin, McDowell, Wilkes, and Watauga.

7.0 Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

2023 Awarded RTP Projects

Project Title	Grant Recipient	County	Region	User Group	Award Amount
Wayehutta Trail Project	US Forest Service	Jackson	Mountain	OHV	\$96,249.94
Oak Hill Community Park & Forest Trails – Phase II	Foothills Conservancy of NC	Burke	Mountain	Mountain Biking	\$99,999.96
Table Rock Base Trail	Carolina Climbers Coalition	Burke	Mountain	Hiking	\$75,000.00
Cane Creek Mountains Natural Area – Phase 3	Alamance County	Alamance	Piedmont	Hiking	\$100,000.00
Heartbreak Ridge Extension Project	Camp Grier	McDowell	Mountain	Mountain Biking	\$99,640.00
Greenslick Trail Rehabilitation	Pisgah Area SORBA	Buncombe	Mountain	Mountain Biking	\$27,720.00
Abbotts Creek Blueway – Yadkin River State Trail	TRIP for Davidson Co. Foundation	Davidson	Piedmont	Canoe/Kayak	\$100,000.00
Paddy Mountain Park Trails	Blue Ridge Conservancy	Ashe	Mountain	Hiking	\$100,000.00
North Carolina Coastal Federation Carteret County Nature Trail	NC Coastal Federation	Carteret	Coastal	Multi-Use/Greenway	\$62,283.30
Neusiok Trail Surfacing Enhancement	US Forest Service	Craven	Coastal	Hiking	\$99,967.50
Broad River Greenway Trail Improvement	Cleveland County	Cleveland	Mountain	Multi-Use/Greenway	\$100,000.00
Roaring River Park and River Access	Wilkes County	Wilkes	Mountain	Hiking	\$100,000.00
Old Fort Fonta Flora State Trail Extension	Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail	McDowell	Mountain	Multi-Use/Greenway	\$100,000.00
Haywood County Bike Park	Haywood County	Haywood	Mountain	Mountain Biking	\$100,000.00
River Landing Boardwalk Extension	Town of Williamston	Martin	Coastal	Multi-Use/Greenway	\$100,000.00
Cape Carteret Multi-Use Trail	Town of Cape Carteret	Carteret	Coastal	Multi-Use/Greenway	\$100,000.00
Middle Fork Greenway – Boone Gorge Park	Watauga County	Watauga	Mountain	Multi-Use/Greenway	\$100,000.00